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ABSTRACT

Many children needlessly fail in public school. They have adequate intelligence and academic aptitude, but they do no complete and turn in work. Their self-esteem plummets and they do not seem capable of recovery without adult help. The Academic Skills Workshop (ASW) is a model program for educators who believe in the ability of parents to help their own underachieving student. This intervention was originally developed entirely outside the school setting to help failing students academically without the need to conference directly with teachers or counselors. The workshop is given in the evening in groups of six to eight parent/student pairs. The ASW meets for an hour once a week for 5 weeks and uses behavioral psychology to shape adaptive home study habits and to turn in work. Students chart on-task time in each subject with a stopwatch. Students are required to study 5 nights a week. Students are told there is no such thing as not having homework and are directed towards methods of working on the appropriate course. Helping students with poor home study skills is conceived as a high-level parenting/behavior change problem, not a teaching problem. The key is to reach into the home, activate parental interest, and empower parents to become positively engaged in their child's education. (ABL)

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Abstract

Academic Skills Workshop: A Parent/Child Group Method to Stop School Failure

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Many children needlessly fail in public school. They have adequate intelligence and academic aptitude, but they *do not complete and turn work in.* Their self-esteem plummets and they do not seem capable of recovery without adult help. The **Academic Skills Workshop (ASW)** is an model program for educators who believe in the ability of parents to help their own underachieving student. This session presents a powerful, yet non-threatening small group counseling method that attracts large numbers of parents to come with their student to Academic Skills Workshop "classes." Parents are encouraged to share major responsibility to help stop the failure cycle by using a home-based method.

Parents often have more influence to help failing children study and turn work in than teachers, but they commonly need support and direction to make it happen. The ASW is run in the evenings on self-generated funds that in nearly all cases will completely pay for staff time and workshop materials. This is an exciting behavioral program that both parents and students evaluate very positively. Typically they stop fighting over homework and report improved relationships. The ASW is economical in terms of time and money and addresses the study problem at it's roots. *It is something new you haven't seen before.*

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NASP PRESENTATION '88/89

THE ACADEMIC SKILLS WORKSHOP

A Parent/Child Group Intervention to Stop School Failure

Why an Academic Skills Workshop That Includes Parents?

Every year millions of academically capable middle and high school age students fail or markedly underachieve. Competent school psychologists, counselors, teachers and administrators work vigorously within the school setting to set up individualized school plans to avoid yet another educational failure...and too often the child continues to fail or do poorly . In fact, while checking grade reports as part of my doctoral dissertation at a "middle class" junior high, I found that nearly 45% of all 7th and 8th graders had at least one D or F in the first quarter.(1) This level of failure is arguably going on nationwide and is totally unacceptable. What's happening? It occured to me that the *time-honored way for otherwise capable children to fail is to not complete their work and turn it in on time*. This has almost nothing to do with intelligence and everything to do with the kind of structure children experience at home and at school.

What is the Academic Skills Workshop?

This intervention was originally developed entirely outside of the school setting to help failing students academically *without* the need to conference directly with teachers or counselors. The workshop has proven so popular that it has been full every month for 5 years. It is given in the evening by a trained leader who is paid for evening work out of the proceeds of the workshop (parents who can afford it are charged a nominal fee, it is free to poor families). Those attending this session at the NASP conference can expect videotape modeling and discussion of the process.

<u>Skills Specific to This Intervention</u>:

1) It is done in groups of 6-8 parent/student pairs.

2) It meets for an hour once a week for 5 weeks and uses behavioral psychology (demonstrated on videotape with a treatment group) to shape adaptive home study habits and turn in work.

3) All students chart on-task time in each subject (see below) with a stopwatch. There are no exceptions. The stopwatch is an excellent biofeedback tool that lets students know when they are really working (many learn that they *thought* they were working when they were not).

STUDY PLAN
Academic Skills Workshop
Daily Goals

Name_____
Date_____

Subjects:	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Week Total	Teacher Comments: Grade, Attitude, Work in?
Total Stopwatch Time									WeeklyAverage=____
Start/Finish	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	(Add total number of minutes for the week and divide by 5 days.)
Place You Studied									
Parent Initials									

4) Students are required to study 5 nights a week "whether they need to or not" and are given two days off. Starting with the first session the parent/student pair negotiates the on-task time the student will study each night. A "dedicated non-studier" might start with 15 minutes/night and then gradually work up to about 60 minutes over a 5 week period.

5) The critical question failing students always ask is, "what do you do if you don't have any homework?" This question has laid waste to countless

excellent educational intentions. The only appropriate response is to tell the student there is **no such thing as not having homework** and then explain that they have your full permission to (a) reread, rewrite, rework, redo anything they are supposed to do, if that is not enough then they are to (b) politely ask their teachers for suggestions about how they might work 15 minutes on the subject at home (this is very effective), or (c) check out books related to their subjects and read those during contracted time (this is so noxious they generally find a way to work longer on "real" assignments).

6) In general, for the entire 5 weeks we work in a group format that uses humor, caring confrontation, modeling, shaping, "public commitments," and parent praise of their own, and other children in the group for steps forward. These techniques are demonstrated on the videotape and their clinical use is discussed. A consistently reported side-effect is improved communication between parent and student.

Learning Outcomes:

Helping students with poor home study skills is conceived as a high-level parenting/behavior change problem, not a teaching problem (although we do address such things as note taking, test taking, how to remember, and using recall patterns). The real key is to reach into the home, activate parental interest, and empower them to become positively engaged in their child's education. Using this method, some students have gone from all D and F grades to all A's and B's with 5 weeks of group intervention that does not require school conference time.

It is important to remember that even the majority of dysfunctional parents typically feel urgency about their child's academic achievement, although they may not know how to be helpful to their child on their own. According to a short article in the September '88 issue of Psychology Today, teachers cite "lack of parental interest" as the biggest educational problem. This simply doesn't have to be; the time has come in

education to ***proactively reach beyond the 8:00 am to 4:00 pm school day*** and offer our expertise and support to parents. We have something of value to contribute in this area. Conference participants open to new ideas will leave with fresh insight into the cycle of school failure and a strong new treatment to add to their repertoire that often succeeds, even after school-based interventions have failed.

(We now have written a self-help book for parents. Modestly priced workshop materials are available for school psychologists interested in trying out this method for themselves.)